Chapter – V

SAMADI OR BACHELOR’S DORMITORY
AS A TRADITIONAL INSTITUTION

Every tribal society has some traditional institutions which in fact govern their socio-political, economic and religious life. These institutes are so much deep-rooted that withstanding the weak and tear of time and the various forces of changes brought about modernism, they have still retained their originality. Tribals have their own way of socio-economic, political and overall a distinct cultural life. Mankind is enriched by education which brings overall change not only in the way of life but also in the way of thinking. As a result changes take place and this change is somewhere very prominent and pronouncing and somewhere it is very slight. Despite these changes which have come over time, some of these aboriginal ethnic tribe of the North-East states have accepted education, but an overall change has not taken place and they still love to live according to their age-old traditions. Modernisation comes through education, they look into it but they are still guided by their traditional values.1

The Bachelor's dormitory forms an integral part of every tribal societies of N.E. India. Called by different names by different tribes, the institution projected the socio cultural life of a particular tribe. It is mostly common among all the tribes of North-East i.e. Dewri, Chutia, Aou Naga, Mizo, Dimasa, Aadi, Garo, Karbi, Zami, Changam, Menong, Melang, Mishing, Tiwa etc. In some tribal community like Aadi, Nockte, Wancho have their girls dormitory where the girls can acquire the technique of dancing and singing as well as spinning and weaving.\(^2\) This dormitory serves as a centre of discussion of important matters in a tribal village, including wars and hunting expeditions. It is also a place where village disputes are settled and youngsters are trained in arts and crafts, besides providing young boys and girls with an opportunity to have their first experience in romantic affairs. In the absence of any formal educational system, most of the tribes in India have their traditional institutions for educational purpose. Education among the tribals is usually imparted through family. Family being the smallest and primary unit of the social organization, education is imparted by imitation and association and at same places through the imitation rites and subsequent disciplines.\(^3\) The Tiwa's *samadi* is also a such type of institution which is the nervecentre of traditional village life.


Education is the interaction between individual and society. G. E. George Payne, the father of Educational Sociology while defining educational sociology says – by educational sociology we mean – the social relationships in which or through which the individual gives and organizes his experience.\textsuperscript{4}

These social interdependencies include not merely those which the individual gains or organizes as child, but also those social groups and processes in which he must function in adult life. These social relationships are furthermore regarded particularly in relation to the educational system in its evolution and changing function. In the light of the above definition the dormitory institution of Tiwa society is the important institution of educational sociology, since behaviour of the individual conditioned by his culture.

5.1 \textit{Samadi – A Piller of Tiwa Tribe}

\textit{Samadi}, the bachelor’s dormitory is known as \textit{dekachang} in Assamese. Literally, \textit{samadi} means the place of enjoyment for boys \textit{Sa} – means boys and \textit{madi} – means enjoyment.\textsuperscript{5} Thus it is a place

\begin{itemize}
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where the village boys can enjoy their life with a happy and free atmosphere. According to another version in Tiwa language \( ti + wa \) suffix means people living near the river.\(^6\) The Samadi, the nerve centre of traditional Tiwa village life, is not common in the plains areas amongst the Tiwas. It is found in the Hills areas and foothill areas, though the same is found in a few plain Tiwa village too. With the spread of vaishnavism of the great Sankardeva amongst the Tiwa, the place of samadi is taken over by the namghar among the Tiwa of the plain. However, samadi is a very important socio-cultural institution around which the traditional Tiwa life revolves. When there was no modern system of imparting education among the Tiwa, the Samadi imparted education among the youths for their future life in household affairs and management of social life. It is the training centre for agricultural works, traditional crafts for day today life and the spirit of co-operative social works. It gives the youths the training of arts, dance and music. The fundamental knowledge of traditional rituals and values are given to the youths. The first hand knowledge of sex too is achieved by the young-inmates in the samadi. It also provides training to fight with the enemies. Tiwa’s samadi is also the platform of giving training on judicial

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duties. Old folks of the village assemble on the samadi at mel for giving mandate. It is a traditional school of art and music. Musical instruments such as khrambar, khraikhram, pangchi, throng, tomblang, kali etc. are kept here. Members of the samadi observe annual festival like sagra, wanchuwa in the premises of the samadi.

The Tiwas dormitory is constructed on a site near the dwelling area from where all the houses are within easy reach. Samadi which floor is made of bamboo has no wall. It is an open huge hall where some of the art related to female breasts and sex organs have also seen on the front side of the cross-beams.7

5.2 Construction Procedure

The samadi of Tiwas is a huge hall constructed on wooden posts raised a few feet above the ground. It is generally constructed at the middle of a village. There are three main big wooden posts of the samadi. The front post is called changdoloi, the middle one is changmajhi and the last one is called huruma. These posts are named by the office bearers of the samadi who are known as changdoloi, changmajhi and huruma. These posts are religiously called thom thuna8 which are very beautifully decorated.

The dormitory is used as a sleeping place for the bachelors and sometimes married males also sleep at night. In a village where the traditional officials like Doloi, Pator, Saot, Maji are there, the changdoloi and changmaji are selected by them. In villages where these traditional functionaries are not present, the gaonbuha (village headman) of the village select them. The other functionaries of the dormitory like huruma, kra khura banthai etc. are selected by the boys themselves.

The preparation for the construction of the dormitory is the duty of the boys who have to pass over with the senior group. The loro, the changdoloi, and the boys have to go to the jungle on an appointed day to collect timber. The changdoloi will select three big trees for the main posts of the dormitory. Before the first one is cut, the loro prays to the deity of the jungle. He says – Oh lord of the jungle, we are going to cut this tree for making the front post of our dormitory and it will be its big brother, the borjela. Be kind to us and don’t take any offence with us. After that the tree is allowed to fall on the east. If it falls on any other side other than the east, it will be rejected and a new one will have to cut. The two other of the three main posts are also felled in the same way. All other materials such as bamboo, cane and thatching grasses are collected on the same day and brought to the village.
Before the old dormitory is broken up a pacificatory ritual is performed over the three principal posts by the preach and the leader of the boys. They should go near the front post – the borjela and pray for bestowing peace, happiness and strength on the dormitory boys. They beg of it not to take any offence if any of the dormitory boys had misbehaved or acted wrongly during the past six years.

No women are allowed to enter inside the dormitory hall. They must keep away from it. They may however, watch the function of the dormitory, but from a distance. Two-village spell loner (Ojhas) are the first who can enter in a new dormitory house.

5.3 Mode of entrance to Samadi

There are some formalities to enter in a samadi. As mentioned earlier that only boys are allowed to enter in the dormitory, hence the dormitory boys are divided into three groups – the sub-junior, the junior and the seniors.

The sub-junior group is included from the age group between 7 to 16 years and they are called as khorkia-panthai, the junior group is from 17 to 28 years and are called as panthai and the senior group which includes above 28 years of age is known as gra-panthai.9 The

last group is the senior group and well experience holder and therefore the junior and sub-junior groups always give respect and honour to them.

During the dormitory period a boy has to work under strict supervision of the senior boys. It is the training institute where unmarried youths learn music and arts. They practice various kinds of handicrafts and while sleeping at night, maintain the vigil over the possible attack by evil doers. The young members of dormitory are to be formally invited to socio-religious occasions like marriage, death rites etc. and they remain in charge of the reception.

There is prohibition in the entry of the females into the samadi. The wood carvings of female breasts on the horizontal front bar of the samadi signify, according to Tiwa belief, that females have no entry into it.10

5.4 Organisational Structure

For the smoothrunning of a Samadi, the Tiwas always maintain a strict rule. In each and every dormitory, there is a management committee with different portfolios.

The following table depicts their posts and duties –

### Table 5.1

#### Dormitory Management Committee

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl.No.</th>
<th>Name of the post</th>
<th>Duties and Responsibilities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Changdoloi</td>
<td>Group Leader/Head</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Changmaji</td>
<td>Deputy Group Leader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Huruma</td>
<td>Water Supplier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Barikha</td>
<td>Correspondent/Messenger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Bepasari</td>
<td>Cloth Supplier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Thuramul</td>
<td>Assistant to Group Leader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Phurakhel</td>
<td>Officer-in-charge of Intelligence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Bhandari khel</td>
<td>Cook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Tangaria</td>
<td>Rice-beer supplier</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### 5.5 Functions and Duties

**A. Changdoloi**

The *changdoloi* is the main leader of a *samadi*. He must be selected from the senior group. A boy of a clan will be selected as *changdoloi* for one term and for the next term a boy from another clan will be selected as *changdoloi*. The term of a *changdoloi* continues...
for twelve years in a village where traditional functionaries are there. The leader, *changdoloi*, is first chosen by *loro* (priest) and the village chief on the suggestions of the elders. The *changdoloi* have to exercise full control over the boys of the village. The boys of the dormitory are responsible for rendering help in agricultural work to any household of the village which may need it. When a villager wants help from the dormitory boys they have to go to the *changdoloi*, offers him a pot of rice beer and asks for his help. If the *changdoloi* accepts the prayer, it means that he is going to help. Every work undertaken is usually completed within a day. All the boys in the dormitory must obey the orders of *changdoloi* and perform all sorts of works as directed by him. They have to level fields of the village, sow their paddy, fetch bamboo from the jungle for building houses.

**B. Changmajhi**

He is the deputy group leader of a dormitory. He is in charge of the dresses and musical instruments of the boys on festive occasion. The *changmajhi* has four assistants, namely – *huruma, tangaria, tiluakheda* and *rebhari* under him for special duties on festive occasions. Apart from these, *changmajhi* with the help of *changdoloi* has to monitor all the activities of the dormitory boys. The term of
*changmajhi* is also same as *changdoloi*. If any dormitory boy becomes sick, he may stay in his parental home but after his recovery, the *changmajhi* will go to the boys home and bring him back.

**C. Barikha**

*Barikha* is the messenger of the village. Any kind of information from the dormitory must be sent to the villagers through the *barikha*. He is also assisted by the village elders and other dormitory boys.

**D. Huruma**

The next official is called *humura*. He is responsible for maintaining and keeping cleanliness in the village roads as well as around the dormitory. Collecting water from the nearby river or steam and supply it to the dormitory members, must be supervised by him.

**E. Bepasari**

He is the officer in-charge of various types of clothes. Different types of dresses are required in a dormitory house for different festive purpose. So all responsibilities, related to these matters must be borne by this officer.

**F. Phurakhel**

He is in-charge of all intelligence report as well as moral duty observer.
G. Bhandarikhel

*Bhandarikhel* is mainly related with preparation of meal and supplying it to the dormitory boys at proper time. At the same time he is also in charge of preparing of ricebeer.

Like other tribes, the Tiwa’s dormitory organization has also gradually disappearing. Now-a-days every village have their *namghars* or community prayer hall. Though it is primarily a place of religious service, the elders can meet there to discuss any matter or to settle disputes between the members of the *khel*. It is used on festive occasions for dancing and community feasting.

5.6 Parts of dormitory house

The Tiwas *Samadi* is divided into four parts. Each part of this institution is used for a specific purpose. The front area of the main interior post *nomaji* is used for ceremonies. The portion behind it known as *nukthi* which is used for sitting. There are two fire places, the front one meant for the village elders and guests and the back one is for the officials of the dormitory. There are assigned places for the *changmajhi* and the *changdoloi* in the fire place. The sleeping place for the dormitory boys is known as *nucha* is on the left as one enters
by the front, between its wall and a row of posts parallel to the central posts. On the opposite side to the left, there is a similar place where the boys store firewood and implements. The drums and flutes are hanged from the cross beams in the dormitory.

5.7 Aims of dormitory institution

A dormitory is a community centre for socio-political, cultural and religious life. Tiwas' *Samadi* is not a place of sleeping for unmarried young boys at night, but it is the temple where they can make themselves a complete man.

In each and every society there are certain social organizations for the welfare of the society as well as to preserve and transmit culture and tradition from one generation to other. In Tiwa society also *samadi* plays a tremendous role in the process of preservation of their rich cultural heritage.

The main aims and objectives of the *Samadi* organisation among the Tiwa society can be enlisted in the following ways –

a. It is a place where all the village boys get training for physical work and war.
b. The boys by living in the dormitory acquire knowledge about community life, co-operation, friendship and brotherhood.

c. It is a place where they can develop their innate artistic tendencies related with art, music, dancing etc.

d. It is a place where their moral character can be built and developed into a healthy personality.

e. Leader is always required for a stable society, Samadi is an institution where all leadership qualities can be cultivated with the help and guidance of the senior officials.

f. It is a place where the boys are physically, mentally and intellectually trained up.

g. It is also a storehouse of Tiwas socio-cultural activities. Most of the festivals are organized by this institution through which common people can take enjoyment from it.

h. It is like a modern museum where war weapons as well as musical instruments are preserved in a scientific way, so that the next generation can use it properly.

i. It is also a village court where all types of disputes can be solved with discussion for the betterment of the community living.
Lastly, we can say that in a dormitory a Tiwa young boy receives all the training that needed for becoming an independent householder who can bear responsibilities of his wife and the entire family.

In this dormitory institution, there is no scope for exercising any option in the matter of becoming a dormitory member. A boy is automatically included in his village dormitory after he has completed the age of seven to ten.\textsuperscript{11} As belonging to an organized unit, the dormitory boys can not go to join his family in the agricultural operations without the permission of the leader. He should not maintain any active connection with his family. Of course, he can go there daily for his meal.

5.8 Relation with Modern Educational Institution

A society depends upon education for its development and progress of its cultural, social as well as economic life. Each generation has to handover the experiences, traditions, thoughts and values of its own as well as those that it has inherited, to the succeeding generation. Then, training in similar ways of adult life of the members of society is also to be given. All this end is achieved through education. It is.

therefore, that each society has to maintain and develop institutions for the transmission of its rich cultural heritage to the rising generation.\(^{12}\)

In primitive society the young persons were initiated into the ways of social life, the mores, the customs by means of informal education. They learnt by actual participation what they were expected to do in adult life. With the growth and development of civilization, our social life become complex and there arise the necessity for formal education to perpetuate the pattern of our social life and its tradition. The schools were brought into existence for transmitting the cultural heritage of the younger generation.

\textit{Samadi}, as a socio-cultural institution, we found that there are some major functions, viz. provision for dancing, music, various aspects of cultural transmission and proving cooprative labour unit thereby enhancing community spirit. It may act as an institution of voluntary agency for community development. \textit{Samadi} is also a school for village administrative training and is dependent upon the elders for help and guidance. As this is an institution of dependent members of

the society, it has no political force and as such this institution plays an educative role which develops a complete personality in the context of village community life as prescribed by their own culture.

From this point of view, we can compare Tiwa's Samadi with modern formal education institution i.e., schools. Moreover, it will be very fruitful if we call it as a socio-cultural institution. Just like modern education, in dormitory, they are also pre-planned in aim, scope and programmes. The time and place of their activity as well as the means of their procedure and performance are all fixed and well regulated. They are kept under a certain code of discipline and regularly supervision.

As a pure and progressive institution, Samadi has been playing an important role in Tiwa society from generation to generation. Modern job oriented or vocational education was offered in Tiwas Samadi from very old age. In this context, we can also compare Samadi institution with the Basic Education Scheme, which formulated by Father of the Nation Mahatma Gandhi, where craft centred education was given and learning by doing was the chief motto of education. Samadi is the original institution of Tiwas, from which all other institutions are developed. Tiwas’ dormitory offers training for boys
in a manner that they enrich the heritage through their own effort and thus help in the establishment of a better and happier society. When there was no provision for social education and learning in the Tiwa villages, *samadi* played the role of social educational institution.

This traditional institution is now gradually dying as it fails to keep the dormitory traditions intact, due to the rapid change brought about by development works including spread of education. Due to the propaganda by Christian missionaries and social workers the institution is slowly dying. Now, the parents do not send their sons to *Samadi*. Modern schools have contributed much towards the decline of *Samadi*. Sometimes, we find that the tribals lack originality of thought and imitate the others.13 It is so because they developed the traits of life through imitation. This has led to dearth of talents in the tribal society. However, the dormitory building may not be there but the spirit of offering a helping hand to the needy by the youths of a Tiwa village has not yet been disappeared. Now-a-days lower primary schools have been established in almost all the Tiwa villages and formal education is imparted to the children.

Due to the advent of modern education and changing culture the importance of dormitory institutions become decreasing. Today, however, there are *samadis* in a few Tiwa villages but a little stress on the training of the youths are given. Culture is the essence and identity of an ethnic tribe. The *sumadi*, which still works as the cultural centre, can give more light to the Tiwa community. Now-a-days young educated Tiwa shows no importance to the *samadi* and this is true particularly in the plains. But the *samadi* is still the pride of the Tiwa. If the *samadi* reorganised according to the necessity of time, it can give a new dimension and through new light on the community. Having realized the socio-economic and cultural importance of the *samadi*, the Tiwa Autonomous Council, Morigaon, had constructed one *samadi* at Fakali gaon near the Killing river in 1999. The DRDA of Morigaon has been constructing two other *samadies* – one at Silchang and another at Dahali under the Morigaon district of Assam. The old ideas and purposes of the *samadi* were different. In these days too the *samadi* can be used for various purposes relating to the socio-economic transformation of the Tiwa community which is still more or less backward in many aspects.
Lastly, we can say that modern social system has dealt a heavy blow to the institution of *samadi*. Formal education has changed the way of life, the social aspirations, the attitudes towards tribal culture both in material and non-material aspects and has a tendency towards the destruction of tribal norms.